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I.—MODERN THOUGHT IN MEREDITH'S POEMS

"Victorian" is now commonly used as a depreciatory epithet, and yet we shall search the history of the last thousand years in vain for a period of more important social, political, and industrial changes than those carried on in the Victorian Era. The changes in the spiritual sphere were no less significant. Professor Henry Sidgwick, a singularly acute and subtle observer, writing to Tennyson's son for the Biography published in 1897, said of the sixties:—

During these years we were absorbed in struggling for freedom of thought in the trammels of a historical religion: and perhaps what we sympathize with most in "In Memoriam" at this time, apart from the personal feeling, was the defence of "honest doubt," the reconciliation of knowledge and faith in the introductory poem, and the hopeful trumpet-ring of the lines on the New Year—

Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace,

and generally the *forward* movement of the thought.

Well, the years pass, the struggle with what Carlyle used to call "Hebrew old clothes" is over, Freedom is won, and what does Freedom bring us to? It brings us face to face with atheistic science: the faith in God and Immortality, which we had been struggling to clear from super-

stition, suddenly seems to be *in the air*: and in seeking for a firm basis for this faith we find ourselves in the midst of the "fight with Death" which "In Memoriam" so powerfully presents.¹

The main influences which brought about these changes were (1) the conception of evolution, applied first to geology, and then to zoology, with the support of an array of evidence which proved ultimately overpowering; (2) the application of modern methods of historical and literary investigation to the documents on which English Protestantism had based its conception of Evangelical Christianity. There resulted the passing, in the minds of a considerable portion of the community, and those the most intelligent and influential, of religious beliefs which had held sway in England for centuries, and the predominance, among the intellectual leaders of the nation, of a new order of ideas—a change as remarkable as that from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican system of astronomy. The earlier revolution of ideas, slowly effected as the outcome of the theories of Copernicus, placed the earth in a new relation to the rest of the universe; the later revolution placed man in a new relation to the other animals, and greatly modified current conceptions as to his past history and future destiny. It was a painful process to adjust to the new conception beliefs deeply implanted by early training, and supported by all the force of established tradition; indeed, the process of adjustment is not yet fully accomplished. The varied emotions which accompanied the earlier stages of reconstruction are expressed by different poets in different ways: Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Clough, Swinburne, Meredith, Francis Thomson, and James Thompson give voice, each in his own fashion, to the prevailing sense of spiritual unrest, and each of them offers a different solution to the problem of adjustment. It would

¹ *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir by his Son*, v. 1, pp. 301-2.

be of interest to analyse the view of each, for each has something definite and individual to say, but in this paper I propose to confine myself to the three whom I think most significant—Tennyson, Browning, and Meredith. I propose, moreover, to give the fullest treatment to Meredith's views, because Tennyson and Browning, advanced and unorthodox as they appeared to their contemporaries, must now, I think, be regarded as conservative and inclined to compromise, clinging to as much of the past as possible, and not accepting the new theories without very great hesitation and reserve—expressing in some instances strong antagonism.

I. EVOLUTION

This point may be made clear if we take as an example the attitude of the three poets with regard to the theory of evolution. Huxley, its most powerful exponent, said at the time of Tennyson's death that, "He was the only modern poet, in fact, I think, the only poet since the time of Lucretius, who has taken the trouble to understand the work and tendency of the men of science."¹ Meredith, it may be presumed, Huxley had not read; but why did he omit Browning? Browning thought that he understood the new scientific theories, and resented the prevailing impression that he was "strongly against Darwin, rejecting the truths of science, and regretting its advance." He wrote in October, 1881:—

All that seems *proved* in Darwin's scheme was a conception familiar to me from the beginning: see in *Paracelsus* the progressive development from senseless matter to organized, until man's appearance (Part V). Also in *Cleon*, see the order of 'life's mechanics'—and I daresay in many passages of my poetry: for how can one look at Nature as a whole and doubt that, whenever there is a gap, a 'link' must be 'missing'—through the limited power and opportunity of the looker? But go back and back, as you please,

¹ *Life and Letters of Huxley*, by his son, v. 2, p. 359.

at the back, as Mr. Sludge is made to insist, you find (*my faith is as constant*) creative intelligence, acting as matter but not resulting from it. Once set the balls rolling, and ball may hit ball and send any number in any direction over the table ; but I believe in the cue pushed by hand. When one is taunted (as I notice is often fancied an easy method with the un-Darwinized)—taunted with thinking successive acts of creation credible, metaphysics have been stopped short at, however physics may fare: time and space being purely conceptions of our own, wholly inapplicable to intelligence of another kind—with whom, as I made Luria say, there is an everlasting moment of creation, if one at all—past, present, and future, one and the same state. This consideration does not affect Darwinism proper to any degree. But I do not consider his case as to the changes in organization, brought about by desire and will in the creature, proved.¹

But the very argument Browning advanced in proof of his comprehension of the new theories is, in fact, evidence to the contrary. The passage in *Paracelsus* upon which he mainly relies was written and published before Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and though the lines in question have been interpreted by some over-enthusiastic Browning devotees as a prophetic anticipation of Darwin, there is nothing in them which Browning might not very well have obtained from Lamarek. The same criticism applies to the still vaguer reference in *Cleon*, and the later allusions in *Prince Hohenstiel Schwangau* and *Fifine at the Fair* are unsympathetic or hostile in intent. The metaphysical sermon Browning addressed to the evolutionists through the mouth of Francis Furini, a Florentine painter who died in 1649, (*Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day*, published in 1887) was not likely to conciliate the scientists, and it is not surprising that Huxley should include him among those who have not "taken the trouble to understand the work and tendency of the men of science." Tennyson studied the new theories, and his attitude is a curious compound of sympathy and

¹ Quoted by Wise, *Letters from Robert Browning to Various Correspondents*, v. 1, pp. 82-84, and by Griffin and Minchin, *The Life of Robert Browning*, p. 295.

distrust. He was baffled and perplexed by the scientific discoveries of the early Victorian period, and gave expression to his perplexity in *In Memoriam* and *Maud*; later, he was sometimes sympathetic, as in the lines *By an Evolutionist*, and at other times suspicious and even hostile, as in *Despair* and *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*. Meredith's attitude to the new theories is entirely sympathetic; he accepted them frankly without dismay or even discouragement, finding indeed in the discoveries of zoological science cause for hope rather than fear. In *The Woods of Westermain* one of the ways in which he invites his followers with "delighted eyes" to "unfold the heaven of things" is a consideration of the past history of the earth and of man:—

Or, where old-eyed oxen chew
Speculation with the cud,
Read their pool of vision through,
Back to hours when mind was mud;
Nigh the knot, which did untwine
Timelessly to drowsy suns;
Seeing Earth a slimy spine,
Heaven a space for winging tons.
Farther, deeper, may you read,
Have you sight for things afield,
Where peeps she, the Nurse of seed,
Cloaked, but in the peep revealed;
Showing a kind face and sweet:
Look you with the soul you see 't.

The spirit of the whole of this fine poem is the glad acceptance of Nature (or Earth as Meredith prefers to call it) as the closest study may reveal it. He applies, indeed, to the whole of life the admonition which Ruskin addressed to his disciples in art—that they "should go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things

to be right and good and rejoicing always in the truth.”¹ But Meredith’s attitude towards Nature differs profoundly from that of the earlier leaders of the Romantic movement; in *Manfred* he ridicules the “bile and buskin Attitude” of Byron :

The cities, not the mountains, blow
Such bladders; in their shapes confessed
An after-dinner’s indigest.

He is far removed from the self-centred view of Coleridge’s *Ode to Dejection*, originally addressed to Wordsworth :

O William ! we receive but what we give
And in *our* life alone does Nature live.

He has more in common with Wordsworth, but he has nothing of Wordsworth’s transcendentalism as set forth in the *Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey*, or the great ode, *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. Born in 1828, and publishing his first volume of poems in 1851, Meredith was profoundly affected by the scientific rationalism which began to gain ground in his early manhood. He sets forth his point of view, clearly distinguishing it from that of Wordsworth, though he does not mention him, in *Earth’s Secret* :

Not solitarily in fields we find
Earth’s secret open, though one page is there :
Her plainest, such as children spell, and share
With bird and beast ; raised letters for the blind.
Not where the troubled passions toss the mind,
In turbid cities, can the key be bare.
It hangs for those who hither thither fare,
Close interthreading nature with our kind.
They, hearing History speak, of what men were,
And have become, are wise.

If we are to retain “solidity and vision,” we must always keep in contact with Earth, “For Earth, that gives the

¹ *Modern Painters*, v. 1, pt. 2, sec. 6, ch. 3, par. 21.

milk, the spirit gives," but we must have regard to the past as well as to the present, and above all we must give heed to the history of man's development.

Historic be the survey of our kind,
And how their brave Society took shape.
Lion, wolf, vulture, fox, jackal and ape,
The strong of limb, the keen of nose, we find,
Who, with some jars in harmony, combined,
Their primal instincts taming, to escape
The brawl indecent, and hot passions drape.
Convenience pricked conscience, that the mind.
Thus entered they the field of milder beasts,
Which in some sort of civil order graze,
And do half-homage to the God of Laws.
But are they still for their old ravenous feasts,
Earth gives the edifice they build no base :
They spring another flood of fangs and claws.

(*Society.*)

This view of the evolution of conscience and mind from convenience is the same as that ridiculed by Browning in *Bishop Blougram's Apology* :

Philosophers deduce you chastity
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
Whoso embraced a woman in the field,
Threw club down and forewent his brains beside,
So, stood a ready victim in the reach
Of any brother savage, club in hand ;
Hence saw the use of going out of sight
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves :
I read this in a French book t' other day.
Does law so analyzed coerce you much ?

The derision to which the evolution theory as applied to morals is here exposed is in accord with Browning's whole conception of man's place in Nature. He constantly regards man as set apart from the lower animals :

a thing nor God nor beast,
Made to know that he can know and not more :
Lower than God who knows all and can all,

Higher than beasts which know and can so far
 As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,
 Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more ;
 While man knows partly but conceives beside,
 Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,
 And in this striving, this converting air
 Into a solid he may grasp and use,
 Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
 Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,
 Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.

(*A Death in the Desert*, 576-588.)

Meredith, on the other hand, regards man as differing from the other animals only in degree, not in essence; and the progress he looks forward to is the development of the race, rather than the future increase in knowledge and power of man as an individual endowed with immortality; but this is a point with which I shall deal more fully under another head.

II. God

Browning's Bishop (and evidently Browning himself) regarded the moral sanction implied by the evolution of ethics as insufficient. Not so Meredith, although his acceptance of the evolutionary hypothesis involved fundamental changes from the religious faith of his youth. His God is the God of Laws; from them there is no escape, and for sin against them there is no forgiveness; disobedience to them means death for the individual, for the race a reversion to lower types of animal life:—

Inconscient, insensitive, she reigns
 In iron laws, though rapturous fair her face.
 Back to the primal brute shall he retrace
 His path, doth he permit to force her chains
 A soft Persuader coursing through his veins,
 An icy Huntress stringing to the chase :
 What one the flash disdains ;
 What one so gives it grace.

(*The Test of Manhood*.)

Neither passion (figured in this poem under the name of Aphrodite, the Persuader) nor asceticism (Artemis, the Huntress), the two great Powers of Nature, will speed man far on his way. Progress came from man himself, "predestined mightier."

His task to hold them both in breast, and yield
Their dues to each, and of their war be field.

Help is to be sought within himself, by the application to Earth of the mind which is itself an outcome of evolution. He must fight out his own battle

with no Power to interpose,
No prayer, save for strength to keep his ground,
Heard of the Highest.

While there is still room in this scheme of things for the idea of God, it is evident that the main stress is on Earth and Man. Man's past has been moulded by himself and by the conditions he has found on this earth. It is

the mind that steers,
By Reason led, her way of tree and flame,
Beyond the genuflexions and the tears;
Upon an Earth that cannot stop,
Where upward is the visible aim,
And ever we espy the greater God,
For simple pointing at a good adored:
Proof of the closer neighbourhood.

(*Ode to the Comic Spirit.*)

God is discerned in the things about us, and the one way to find out God is by means of the human reason, applied to the study of the laws of Nature. Nothing in the popular theology of his time was so offensive to Meredith as the idea of intervention by a Special Providence. In the *Ode to France, December, 1870*, he writes:—

Could France accept the fables of her priests,
Who blest her banners in this game of beasts,
And now bid hope that heaven will intercede

To violate its law in her sore need,
 She would find comfort in their opiates :
 Mother of Reason ! can she cheat the Fates ?
 Would she, the champion of the open mind,
 The Omnipotent's prime gift—the gift of growth—
 Consent even for a night-time to be blind,
 And sink her soul on the delusive sloth,
 For fruits ethereal and material, both,
 In peril of her place among mankind ?
 The Mother of the many Laughters might
 Call one poor shade of laughter in the light
 Of her unwavering lamp to mark what things
 The world puts faith in, careless of the truth :
 What silly puppet-bodies danced on strings,
 Attached by credence, we appear in sooth,
 Demanding intercession, direct aid,
 When the whole tragic tale hangs on a broken blade !

This must not be taken to mean that Meredith's Providence is on the side of big battalions, but rather on the side of the Strength born of "the plain root-Virtues."

Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,
 Train by endurance, by devotion shape.
 Strength is not won by miracle or rape.
 It is the offspring of the modest years
 The gift of sire to son, thro' those firm laws
 Which we name Gods.

Faith in anything else is, in Meredith's view, superstition, and worst of all, to his mind, is the superstition which has its basis in selfishness. Such have been, in large part, he thinks, the religions of the past, which mark the steps of man's progress to something higher :

He drank of fictions, till celestial aid
 Might seem accorded when he fawned and prayed
 Sagely the generous Giver circumspect,
 To choose for grants the egregious, his elect ;
 And ever that imagined succour slew
 The soul of brotherhood whence Reverence drew.

(*The Test of Manhood.*)

He counts indeed among the greatest gifts of Earth "the man-loving Nazarene" (*The Empty Purse*), and in *The Garden of Epicurus* asserts the world's acclaim for "The crucifix that came of Nazareth;" but his sympathy is for the spirit of the founder of Christianity, not for its later organizations and dogmas—

Old institutions and establishments
Once fortresses against the floods of sin

but now

Impeding blocks, less useful than the clod ;
Their angel out of them, a demon in.

(*Ode to the Comic Spirit.*)

These too are the product of man's mind in the earlier stages of its development, and as such served their purpose in their day; but they have no permanence. Nature tolerates them only for a time :

The legends that sweep her aside,
Crying loud for an opiate boon,
To comfort the human want,
From the bosom of magical skies,
She smiles on, marking their source :
They read her with infant eyes.
Good ships of morality they,
For our crude developing force ;
Granite the thought to stay,
That she is a thing alive
To the living, the falling and strewn.

(*A Faith on Trial.*)

The soul must wrestle, not only with the devil of its own imagining, but "with angel more dire" (*A Faith on Trial*). Man's supreme guide is Reason, as Earth is his only teacher: "Never is Earth misread by Brain." (*Hard Weather*). Every aspiration, every fear of man's heart must be tried by this test :

His fables of the Above,
And his gapped readings of the crown and sword,

quoted so often in this paper because it sets forth most completely Meredith's view of the evolution of reason and morals, he writes :

Earth nerved her chastened son to hail athwart
 All ventures perilous his shrouded Sire ;
 A stranger still, religiously divined ;
 Not yet with understanding read aright.

The mastering mind in him, by tempests blown,
 By traitor inmates baited, upward burned ;
 Perforce of growth, the Master mind discerned,
 The Great Unseen, nowise the Dark Unknown.

In all these passages the part played by the human reason in working out this conception of God is insisted on, as well as the need for human effort if further progress is to be made. If man would know God, he must accept the Laws which reveal themselves to the human intelligence as Divine :—

This way have men come out of brutishness
 To spell the letters of the sky and read
 A reflex upon earth else meaningless.
 With thee, O fount of the Untimed ! to lead ;
 Drink they of thee, thee eyeing, they unaged
 Shall on through brave wars waged.

More gardens will they win than any lost ;
 The vile plucked out of them, the unlovely slain.
 Not forfeiting the beast with which they are crossed,
 To stature of the Gods will they attain.
 They shall uplift their Earth to meet her Lord,
 Themselves the attuning chord !

(*Hymn to Colour*, XIII, XIV.)

III. IMMORTALITY

With these opinions as to man's oneness with Nature, his relation to the scheme of things, and the absolute supremacy of Reason, Meredith was bound to take a very different view from that of Tennyson or Browning as to the immortality

of the soul—a question which stirred the minds of so many thinkers throughout the Victorian era, and remains one of the great spiritual issues of our own time. In *Memoriam* expressed Tennyson's faith—a faith clouded by doubt and resting upon a hesitating and troubled acceptance of orthodox theology; Browning, in his more vigorous fashion, attempted to find philosophic justification for a similar view in *La Saisiaz*—with no great success, if one may judge from the bewilderment of his critics, though to my mind it is clear that he retained a firm belief in personal immortality. Meredith refused to go further than reason would carry him, and frankly accepted the place assigned to man in the order of nature by the evolutionary hypothesis. In his view life is good as it is and gives hope for a better future for the race; he does not feel Browning's need to call in a future existence for the individual to redress the balance of the present. He gives a direct answer to the question asked by Tennyson in *Wages*:—

The wages of sin is death : if the wages of Virtue be dust,
 Would she have heart to endure for the life of the worm and the fly?
 She desires no isles of the blest, no quiet seats of the just,
 To rest in a golden grove, or to bask in a summer sky :
 Give her the wages of going on, and not to die.

Meredith's reply, put into the mouth of his highest authority, Earth, is :

Spirit raves not for a goal.
 Shapes in man's likeness hewn,
 Desires not ; neither desires
 The Sleep or the Glory : it trusts.

(*A Faith on Trial.*)

His opinion on this issue is unmistakable. In *Dirge in Woods* and *Woodman and Echo* he identifies himself and his fellow men with the falling trees. We drop like the fruits, and die like the pine cones to live again only in our successors. Like the trees, we grow only for service, and death

clears us away to make room for others,—“For braver let our minds agree,” for a rational hope in the future of the race is Meredith’s one ground of faith. Facing “the Question Whither,”—

When we have thrown off this old suit,
So much in need of mending,
To sink among the naked mute,
Is that, think you, our ending?—

he answers that not all seed comes to flower; that continuity of sensation, if it were granted to the individual, would be a curse from which we should pray for release; that the soul which endureth is not for personality but for “labour done”; only our work is everlasting, and that, not questions as to our own fate, should be our care.

We children of Beneficence
Are in its being sharers;
And Whither vainer sounds than Whence,
For word with such wayfarers.

(*The Question Whither.*)

Only under the stress of personal bereavement,—at the death of his beloved wife, Marie Vulliamy,—

My good companion, mate,^{my own,}
Pulse of me,

did he seek for consolation in the hope of a future life, and, like Huxley on a similar occasion,¹ he rejected all such consolation as illusory because unjustified by human reason face to face with the facts of existence.

¹ See Huxley’s letter on the death of his son, addressed to Kingsley,—*Life u. s.*, v. 1, pp. 233–239. Huxley’s opinions, especially as expressed in the paragraphs on pp. 235–6 are in remarkable agreement with Meredith’s. The letter, though written in 1860, was not published till 1901, but the view it sets forth was “in the air,” especially in scientific circles. Huxley says in the course of his letter: “Understand that all the younger men of science I know intimately are essentially of my way of thinking.”

I caught
 With Death in me shrinking from Death,
 As cold from cold, for a sign
 Of the life beyond ashes : I cast,
 Believing the vision divine,
 Wings of that dream of my Youth
 To the spirit beloved : 'twas unglased
 On her breast, in her depths austere :
 A flash through the mist, mere breath,
 Breath on a buckler of steel.

Earth is absolutely unresponsive to the personal appeal. This is a striking contrast to the confident and insistent personal note of Browning's *Prospice* and to the tempered faith of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Meredith regards all such hopes, for one's self or for others, as not merely illusory, but as weak, not spiritual aspirations but sensual dreams, the cry not of faith, but of unfaith. (*A Faith on Trial*). Our straining to the farther shore is really an attempt to gain personal comfort and advantage; a yearning to make sure of the Impalpable by touch; to reveal what Nature has left hidden. To the fleshly desires of "assurances, symbols," she turns a deaf ear: "Harsh wisdom gives Earth, no more." But for those who accept Earth for what she is, and acknowledge themselves bound to bloom and fade like her flowers, she has the richest rewards, even in bereavement:

Earth your haven, Earth your helm,
 You command a double realm;
 Labouring here to pay your debt,
 Till your little sun shall set;
 Leaving her the future task:
 Loving her too well to ask.
 Eglantine that climbs the yew,
 She her darkest wreathes for those
 Knowing her the Ever-new,
 And themselves the kin o' the rose.

(*The Woods of Westermain.*)

IV. DEMOCRACY

The difference between Meredith and his two great predecessors in Victorian poetry goes far deeper than the acceptance or rejection of the theory of evolution on the one hand, or the orthodox religious faith of the time on the other. Browning and Tennyson were both affected, though in different ways, by the individualist impulse of the Romantic Revival and by the allied influences in contemporary thought. In the case of Browning this is abundantly clear. His earlier poems are all studies of the individual soul, and he is evidently expressing his own view when he makes Tiburzio say in *Luria* (V. 299-302):

A people is but the attempt of many
To rise to the completer life of one;
And those who live as models for the mass
Are singly of more value than they all.

His sonnet, *Why I am a Liberal*, shows that the foundation of his political creed is the desire for liberty for himself, and, by logical consequence, for others. Tennyson, in spite of his humanitarianism, is essentially conservative, in the broad meaning of the word, and in the latter part of his life he became almost reactionary; the vague aspirations for "the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world" in *Locksley Hall* become *Sixty Years After* the unreasoned vituperation of modern literature and democratic movements. His hero laments that "Science grows and Beauty dwindles"—"Art and Grace are less and less;" even the "Lion passant," the Locksley arms at the village inn, gives place to the peasant cow:

Poor old Heraldry, poor old History, poor old Poetry, passing hence,
In the common deluge drowning old political common sense.

The poem is, of course, as its author said, "dramatic," and it would not be fair to identify the poet with his hero; but

the *Memoir* shows that similar opinions, in less violent language, were expressed by Tennyson in private conversation with his friends. He is reported as saying :¹ " I do not in the least mind if England, when the people are less ignorant and more experienced in self-government, eventually *becomes a democracy*." This was in 1887, and the tone and phraseology of the sentence are more significant than the opinion it contains. Tennyson " did not mind ! " But it was a change of which he said on another occasion, " May I not live to see it. " ² He voted for the Franchise Bill of 1884, not because he liked it, but because he felt that it was not safe to refuse. His politics, like his morals, are those of the conservative middle class of Victoria's reign, and when he became a Peer, he took on the colour of his new surroundings with marvellous facility. We find him writing to Gladstone in 1884 " the House of Peers has the prior claim to confidence," being older than the House of Commons ; and asking, " What safeguard is there against the destruction of the Constitution and the disruption of the whole Empire, except a chamber like the House of Lords ? " ³ Tennyson stands for traditional conservatism even more completely than Browning does for individualistic liberalism, for the latter attitude is one which does not lend itself readily to poetic expression. Meredith was an out-and-out Radical. In his novels, it is true, he takes his characters chiefly from the upper, or rather, the educated classes, for only in cultivated society could he find play for the Comic Spirit ; but in his poetry his essential democracy is very clearly brought out. *Juggling Jerry*, *The Beggar's Soliloquy*, *The Old Chartist*, *The Patriot Engineer*, and *Grandfather Bridgeman* show not merely his appreciation of the virtues of the English lower classes, but his sympathy with their ideas ; he adopts their

¹ V. 2, p. 338.² V. 2, p. 303.³ V. 2, p. 307 and 303.

view of life as his own, or puts his own view into their mouths. Thus in *A Stave of Roving Tim* (addressed to certain friendly Tramps), he makes his hero sum up in the simplest language the Meredithian philosophy :

Lord, no, man's lot is not for bliss ;
 To call it woe is blindness :
 It's here a kick, and it's there a kiss,
 And here and there a kindness.
 He starts a hare and calls her joy ;
 He runs her down to sorrow :
 The dogs within him bother the boy,
 But 'tis a new day to-morrow.

Equally significant is the moral and political sermon Meredith preaches, speaking in his own person, in *The Empty Purse*, to "our later Prodigal Son," the youth cursed by the inheritance of wealth and privilege. The secret of his ruin has been the ensnaring suggestion, "*Not thou as commoner men !*" All such folly must be abandoned, and he must seek by service a real fellowship with the children of Earth.

The God in the conscience of multitudes feel,
 And we feel deep to Earth at her heart,
 We have her communion with men,
 New ground, new skies for appeal.

Change, directed by intelligence, must be welcomed, and the stupor of precedents shunned. Grandmotherly laws, "Giving rivers of gold to our young," must be discarded :

Men's right of bequeathing their all to their own
 (With little regard for the creatures they squeezed) ;
 Their mill and mill-water and nether mill-stone
 Tied fast to their infant ; lo, this is the last
 Of their hungers, by prudent devices appeased.
 The law they decree is their ultimate slave ;
 Wherein we perceive old Voracity glassed.
 It works from their dust, and it reeks of their grave.

Evidently here we have a modern democratic creed very different from Browning's individualism and Tennyson's

conservatism. But Meredith's democracy is much more than a working political creed ; it is a fundamental doctrine of his philosophy. " Brain democratic " is to be " king of the host," because that has been and must continue to be the way of progress. Democracy, or, as Meredith prefers to call it, fellowship, is a central theme in some of his most important poems. In *The Woods of Westermain* it is at once a part and a consequence of the trustful acceptance of Nature he so often urges :

Drink the sense the notes infuse,
You a larger self will find :
Sweetest fellowship ensues
With the creatures of your kind.
Ay, and Love, if Love it be,
Flaming over *I* and *ME*,
Love meet they who do not shove
Cravings in the van of Love.

The dragon of self must be subdued,—not exterminated (for no force in Nature is slain), but curbed, and put to service. To the cries of " First my Dragon " Earth pays no heed ; her concern is not with the individual, but with the generations ; and Man must learn, in his little way, something of the broadness of vision of Earth. This is the burden of *The Test of Manhood* :

As only for the numbers Nature's care
Is shown, and she the personal nothing heeds,
So to Divinity the spring of prayer
From brotherhood the one way upwards leads.

Fellowship is thus not merely a counsel of prudence, a Law of Nature, but it is the way by which man reaches to the Divine. This is the root of Meredith's antagonism to some forms of religion popular in his day—that they started from self and thus slew "the soul of brotherhood whence Reverence drew."

In fellowship religion has its founts :
 The solitary his own God reveres :
 Ascend no sacred Mounts
 Our hungers or our fears.

 Like the sustaining air
 Are both for flowers and weeds.
 But he who claims in spirit to be flower
 Will find them both an air that doth devour.

This sense of brotherhood is closely linked by Meredith with the development of the intelligence, to which he attaches supreme importance as the chief instrument of human progress. It was not until the mind, "the cherishable mind, the multitude's grave shepherd" took full flight that man gained his first sight of brotherhood and so discerned "the Master mind—The Great Unseen, nowise the Dark Unknown." At first, in blindness, he fought towards God "through crimson mire," but it was only when he upheld "a forehead lamp" and saw humanity not as a doomed army, but "all choral in its fruitful garden camp," that the palpable was illumed by the spiritual. As it was through a sense of fellowship that he first gained spiritual insight, it is by communion with his fellows that he must acquire wisdom. Wisdom dr es

To mummywrap perching a height.
 It chews the contemplative cud
 In peril of isolate scorn,
 Unfed of the onward flood.

(*A Faith on Trial.*)

It is this faith in humanity and, above all, in human reason, that gives Meredith hope for the future. It is not inanimate nature which is recognized by Earth as the supreme miracle; nor even man as the noblest of the animals; but man regarded in his spiritual aspect, reaching out to the Divine.

No miracle the sprout of wheat from clod,
 She knows, nor growth of man in grisly brute ;
 But he, the flower at head and soil at root,
 Is miracle, guides he the brute to God.
 And that way seems he bound ; that way the road,
 With his dark-lantern mind, unled, alone,
 Wearifully through forest-tracks unsown,
 He travels, urged by some internal goad.

(*The Test of Manhood.*)

Meredith's religion, then, is not merely the religion of Earth ; it is equally the religion of Humanity. It relates man not only to the rest of Nature, but to the rest of Mankind, and it relates him to the race not only in its past history, but in its future triumphs. When man, desiring a miracle to save him from extinction, prays

"Sever me from the hollowness of Earth !
 Me take, dear Lord !"

Earth's reply is

"Live in thy offspring as I live in mine."

(*Earth and Man.*)

Thus for the hope of a future life for the individual, Meredith substitutes the certainty of service to the future progress of the race. Earth inspires a homelier faith than a groping in dimness for "the Yonder shores"; she abhors this as an uncertain step in the mire, and plants a firm foot in the midway path of experience. Our hope is in what we see, in the young generations about us, and in Earth's love of her young—"a preference manifest." It is for us to follow Earth's example :

But love we well the young, her road midway
 The darkneses runs consecrated clay.
 Despite our feeble hold on this green home,
 And the vast outer strangeness void of dome,
 Shall we be with them, of them, taught to feel,
 Up to the moment of our prostrate fall,
 The life they deem voluptuously real

Is more than empty echo of a call,
 Or shadow of a shade, or swing of tides ;
 As brooding upon age, when veins congeal,
 Grey palsy nods to think. With us for guides,
 Another step above the animal,
 To views in Alpine thought are they helped on.
 Good if so far we live in them when gone !

(*Youth in Memory.*)

V. WOMAN

Closely connected with Meredith's faith in democracy is his desire for the emancipation of woman. He has suggested this obliquely in some of his novels—in *Rhoda Fleming*, in *Diana of the Crossways*, and above all in the great trilogy : *One of our Conquerors*, *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*, and *The Amazing Marriage*. In each of these we have a woman who is the victim of unequal laws, of outworn conventions, of the brutality of man, or of her own weak nature and deficient education ; but one wonders how many novel readers perceive the thought which underlies the story. In the poems Meredith's teaching is direct and unmistakable, whether the theme is treated lightly and humorously, as in *A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt*, or seriously, indeed, almost tragically, as in *The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady*, which forms such a significant companion piece to *Modern Love*. Meredith's appeal, on this question as on others, is to Nature and Reason ; he has no sympathy with those who in the great name of Nature would break all the bonds of law. The Puritan is, in his view, nearer the reading of Nature than the Libertine, for Nature condemns and punishes inexorably

Sin against immaturity, the sin
 Of ravenous excess, what deed divides
 Man from vitality ; these bleed within ;
 Bleed in the crippled relic that abides.
 Perpetually they bleed ; a limb is lost,
 A piece of life, the very spirit maimed.

(*The Sage Enamoured.*)

On the other hand, the culprit who, in obedience to Nature's law, has broken the law of man, is dubiously blamed by his own conscience. He feels the whip of general condemnation, but he bewails only his isolation from his fellows and the loss of their esteem. Man must build on the foundations of Nature if the structure of human society is to last, and must be moved by higher and deeper considerations than those of immediate advantage. Marriage must be a troth of equal hands, mate and mate, a soul's embrace upon an upper plane, and not the mere exchange of a pious token, by which both man and woman feel themselves cheated. Meredith's outspoken sympathy for what he regards as the wrongs of woman, both in this poem and in *A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt*, is in striking contrast with the hesitating conventionality of Tennyson's *Princess*, which was written, it is true, a generation earlier. Browning, influenced perhaps by his own ideal union, did not step much farther than Tennyson beyond the lines of romantic tradition as to the relations of the sexes; but in his insistence on the sacredness of passion he opened the way for Meredith's wider view. He would have accepted Meredith's definition of passion as "noble strength on fire," and in *The Statue and the Bust*, *In a Balcony*, *Respectability*, and *The Inn Album* he displays a wider sympathy than can have been altogether approved by conventional Victorian morality, which was sorely puzzled by the dialectic of *Flügel at the Fair*. But these are merely incidental outbursts of an intensely vigorous and independent mind, which in the main accepted the prevailing view as to sex-relations, just as, in spite of a genuine independence of spirit in religious matters, Browning accepted, in the main, the orthodox religious position of his time. The remarkable thing about Meredith is that a generation after his poems were published, they still present radical ideas which have not yet been absorbed by many of his readers, although

these are drawn from the classes most likely to be in sympathy with his opinions. The day may, of course, come when Meredith's philosophy will seem as much out of date as the compromises of Browning and Tennyson appear to the advanced thinkers of our own time; but he must at least be recognized as one who was in the van of contemporary thought in science and philosophy—a leader, not merely a follower and interpreter of the ideas of his time.

J. W. CUNLIFFE.